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STATE FOR USAID
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STATE PASS TO EX-IM BANK AND OPIC
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SUBJECT: WHAT CRISIS? BUSINESS FORUMS REAP COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

¶1. (U) Summary. The global economic crisis took a back seat for one week, as Embassy Yaounde's Commercial Team lead a delegation of 45 Cameroonian business leaders and government officials to Washington for meetings with their American counterparts during the week of May 4. The primary objective of Post's Business Forum concept is to introduce Cameroonian business decision-makers, who are traditionally oriented towards European markets, to the American marketplace and the support various USG agencies offer for American exports. The forum also lands immediate export successes--more than \$200,000 in May, mostly in hospitality services and vehicle sales. It also generates promising opportunities, on trade and investment, such as \$40 million in potential sales for Caterpillar, \$4 million for Mack trucks, and another \$4 million for passenger boat sales. The forum plays an equally important but less quantifiable role in fostering relationships between Cameroonian and American communities; this last forum resulted in the signing of a sister cities agreement between Prince George's County Maryland and the Njikwa municipality in the North West Region of Cameroon. End summary.

Bridging the Gap:
The Business Forum Concept

¶2. (U) Having accompanied Cameroonian delegations on a number of the traditional U.S. Department of Commerce events, Post's Commercial Specialists noticed that the Cameroonian participants were often overwhelmed by the size and scope of the American market. Additionally, the American companies participating in large trade shows and expositions were less interested in the relatively small and unknown Cameroonian market. Confident that bankable projects were feasible under the right conditions, Post has developed the concept of the targeted Business Forum, which has proved increasingly popular and successful over the last nine iterations held, alternately, in Chicago and Washington, D.C.

¶3. (U) The forum in Washington is called the Investment Forum on Projects and Finance (IFPF) and the Chicago one is named the Business and Technology forum. The Forums are tailored to clients' needs; Post's Commercial Specialists catalogue the interests of each Cameroonian participant and work with a U.S.-based consultant to identify matching U.S. companies. The Forum invites U.S. government agencies, including OPIC, USTDA and Ex-Im Bank, to explain their services to the Cameroonian and American companies. In successive iterations, the Business Forum concept has continued to evolve to meet the changing needs of participants.

Money in the Bank:
Cars, Hotels and Other Sectors

¶3. (U) Embassy Yaounde's Commercial Team traditionally organizes two forums each year. The last two forums -- in Chicago in November 2008 and in Washington in May 2009 -- brought more than 90 business

executives from Cameroon to the U.S. and resulted in more than 15 containers packed with used automobiles from the U.S. exported to Cameroon, with estimated value of about \$175,000. The U.S. used car market has been an exciting discovery for Cameroonian car dealers, who have been used to buying very old vehicles (15 years and older) from Europe at higher prices. The Embassy's Business Forums have fostered a significant shift towards automobiles from the U.S., with trickle-down demand for American auto-parts manufacturers and distributors. The May 2009 Forum resulted in more than \$200,000 in immediate revenues for American companies, for everything from hotel rooms and transport to consulting services and retail sales.

In the Medium Term:
Promising Business Prospects

¶4. (U) More significant than the immediate retail sales, the Forums also generate promising long-term deals:

--The Forum included a delegation of Cameroonian mayors, who are negotiating the purchase of 140 pieces of Caterpillar equipment and 60 new Mack dump trucks for road construction;

--Cameroonian transportation company COMATRANS, which operates passenger ferries between Cameroon and Nigeria, is negotiating the purchase of a passenger vessel worth \$1.2 million for clients in the oil industry;

--The Cameroonian Ministry of Health is discussing the purchase of a mobile dental clinic and four ambulances from the U.S., with a total value of around \$400,000;

--Two Cameroonian companies, Eshcol Mortgage and Real Estate Company and Blaz Design Management and Investment Corporation presented their concept of the American City Project to American companies participating in the forum. The first phase of the project consists of 300 houses to be constructed in the Yaounde neighborhood of Mimboman in 2010. The developers plan to use 80% U.S. materials, with financing arranged through Ex-Im Bank. Eschol also concluded a partnership with Prince George's County whereby Eschol will lease office space to market housing to the Cameroonian Diaspora;

--Garanti Express, a Cameroonian transport company, is finalizing a deal with MCA, a U.S. bus manufacturer, whereby Garanti Express will import buses and parts directly from MCA or an established dealership. Garanti Express has placed an initial order for two new MCA buses.

Building Lasting Relationships:
Sister City and Partnership Agreements

¶5. (U) In addition to the immediate and medium-term business prospects, the Business Forums provide an opportunity to foster long-term ties between American and Cameroonian communities:

--The 2009 Business forum included an event at the residence of the Cameroonian Ambassador to the U.S. to celebrate a sister city agreement between Prince George's County and the Njikwa municipality in the North West Region of Cameroon, historically the source of the greatest Cameroonian immigration to the U.S. The agreement will involve student exchange programs and assistance for health, education, and project development. In the fall of 2009, the county will host a fundraiser golf tournament with all profits going towards the Sister City partnership.

--The Cameroon Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Craft signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation/Africa Trade Office. The agreement aims to develop joint ventures in trade and business development and training programs focused on fostering trade between Cameroon and Prince George's County;

--CAMWATER (Cameroon's water utility company) and Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), which provides water services in Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's counties, agreed to establish a technical partnership. WSSC committed to providing CAMWATER with training, a list of WSSC's vendors, and a review and

feedback of CAMWATER's projects. CAMWATER will provide WSSC with its list of required equipment for existing projects.

Comment: Immediate Export Successes
While Building Long-Term Relationships

¶6. (U) The Business Forums result in immediate export success in products as diverse as personal vehicles and passenger boats, but their most valuable output may very well be the cultivation of long-term relationships between American businesses and their Cameroonian counterparts, who are increasingly turning to the U.S. in search of alternatives to the traditional commercial relationships with French companies. "Brand USA" is tremendously popular in Cameroon, but Cameroonian entrepreneurs are intimidated by the size of the American market, and traditional commercial products (including IBPs) do not go far enough to help Cameroonians tap into appropriate opportunities. The Business Forum bridges this gap, identifying partners, like Prince George's County's Economic Development Corporation office, that are ideally suited, in size and interest, to match up with Cameroonians companies. End comment.